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Households and Hegemony: Early Creek Prestige Goods, Symbolic Capital, and Social Power. By Cameron B. Wesson.

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a firm believer in the power of images, especially for pedagogical purposes, *First Families* offers an unparalleled resource. In the uphill battle of trying to make California Indians seem real and relevant in the eyes of the mainstream, this “photo album” serves as an easy first incursion. Non-Native students will recognize the photographs for their banality, and thus make important connections between their families and those of California Indians. The value of such recognition cannot be overestimated. The more Native people are seen as the complicated human beings they are, the more they can be removed from the confines of history and mythology, and the more effectively we can engage in the collective practices of decolonization.

Native Californian readers will find validation for the diversity and multiplicity in their own lives in these photographs. They will likely enjoy the quirky neocolonial antics they apparently share with other Native families. They are also liable to find themselves ranging the spectrum of emotions, looking at friends and family passed, relationships changed, places transformed. Yet these are exactly the kind of images that also generate and rekindle memories, reinforce familial bonds, and recall happy events past. *First Families* ultimately offers a wealth of empowerment.

Natchee Blu Barnd

Independent Scholar

Households and Hegemony: Early Creek Prestige Goods, Symbolic Capital, and Social Power. By Cameron B. Wesson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 230 pages. \$55.00 cloth.

Cameron B. Wesson draws attention to “the long term significance of the household as a social and economic force—particularly in relation to authority positions or institutions” and claims that this significance “has remained relatively unexplored in North American archaeology.” Although this claim may be true, a key question is whether archaeology, as a discipline by itself, has powerful enough analytical tools to deal philosophically and comparatively with the nature of authority in societies, particularly those without a written language, and if its scholars without functioning language skills are able to research and interpret effectively the oral traditions and the self-images of these societies. This is not to say that efforts in integration should not be made.

Wesson draws information from ethnohistorical records and data from the Fusihatchee project, which is one of the largest excavations in Alabama history. He attempts to examine social, economic, and political transformations in Creek culture beginning in the sixteenth century. According to Wesson, these changes redefined the relationship between Creek households and authority. Contact with outsiders and what Wesson calls “prestige goods,” traditionally associated with Creek “elites,” contributed to the weakening of chiefly authority, the increase in individual decision making, and the increase in the power of Creek households. That is the thrust of the Wesson thesis.

The book claims to enrich the understanding of Creek history and make a contribution to understanding cultural change.

Households and Hegemony, in addition to an introduction, a bibliography, an index of terms and names used, and maps and tables, contains four chapters that deal with social agents, the Creek social universe, Creek-European interactions, and changing Creek households. There are also some illustrations of grounds and structures from other works, some maps of Creek locations, an extensive bibliography, and some tables on items found in the Alabama digging. The eight-page listing of burial data may attract people interested in the archaeological findings at the Shine, Fusihatchee, Atasi, Blackmon, Tallapoosa, and Childersburg excavations. The tables include the ages of some of the buried people, the number of burial goods, and the author's own classification of "status" goods. The number of goods listed appears to be a relatively small sample on which to base some large generalizations about structures and changes of a large tribe such as the Creeks, whose confederacy once covered much of the southeastern United States and, from the time of European contact onward, endured a long period of tumultuous and externally imposed change.

Understanding the dynamics of tribal societies, which did not have written records, is not an easy matter. Added to this is the problem of nontribal observers, who may neither be familiar with the nuances of the languages spoken in tribal societies nor understand the value systems that helped keep such societies together. This deficiency is evident in much of the anthropological and historical literature on Creeks, which often contains descriptions by naïve observers laced with statements from "informers," and which often sifts through the same tea leaves as the writings of Swanton, Bartram, and others.

Such literature is intermittently dependent on the observations of Benjamin Hawkins, who was sent by Jefferson, then under Washington's umbrella, to be the first US "commissioner" or representative to the southeastern Indians and, in particular, the Creeks. Hawkins's actual task was to control the Creeks, get them into debt at the trading posts, break up tribal land ownership into individual holding, and purportedly move them toward "farming" for survival: a strategy, in reality, that was part of Jefferson's model of contractual removal rather than Jackson's later model involving direct force. Ironically, Creeks were great farmers in early Georgia and Alabama, adept at growing various crops and providing the backbone of Southern agriculture. It was the forcible taking of their lands and the resultant shrinking economic base that drove Creeks toward servitude to the dominant society in its exploitations of the deerskin trade. The relationships between each *talwa* and other regional authority structures depended on context and circumstances, and the developments did not follow a linear time continuum, as Wesson implies, but fluctuated depending on contextual issues such as issues of war.

Wesson claims to avoid earlier models of disease and trade as explanations for change in tribal societies. Instead he projects the development of "prestige goods" as a major factor in social change while dismissing other cultural, political, and economic developments that may have had a more

significant influence. Change of one kind or another constantly affects societies. The real challenge is to analyze and understand the nature and significance of the causal forces involved in such changes. The dynamics of the settler's worldviews, along with their preoccupation with acquisition of land, capital, and guns, were the dominant external forces of change to the Creeks. Another factor was the creation of a mixed-blood elite, which, because of familiarity with English language and manners, contributed to the loss of tribal lands. The Trail of Tears and the removal of Creeks from ancestral homelands played the biggest role in the midst of important change in property, resources, and decision making among the Creeks. The earlier results of "hoarding" goods, a focus in *Households and Hegemony*, seems trivial compared to the external juggernaut the Creeks faced, initially in the series of invasions from the Spanish and later in the buildup of the English and Scotch-Irish populations, which was aided by some key mixed bloods. The Creeks were at the nexus of the clash between the Old World and New World, as much as any other people, especially among the larger tribes.

Another difficulty with *Households and Hegemony* is the shifting, vague, and subjective usage of key terms such as *elites*, *power*, *hierarchy*, *household*, and *hegemony*. These nouns and variables are complex in serious political analysis and must be defined with clarity and precision. In order to illustrate how tribal societies adapted to changes over time, scholars must clearly define these concepts and demonstrate how they apply to the societies in question; some of these concepts might not have even existed in a tribal and nonliterate worldview. At times Wesson criticizes the description of the term *micco* as kingly, yet at other times he contradicts himself, as he depicts the early *micco* making decisions regarding the distribution of surplus goods with complete discretion. At times the author depicts elites as subject to the decentralized consent of the governed while at other times they are described as groups who wield centralized power over the acquisition and distribution of goods, a power that eventually shifted to the households.

But Wesson should not be solely held responsible for this kind of confusion. With the specialization of disciplines, anthropologists and historians dealing with tribal subjects have often worked in vacuums sealed off from political and philosophical analysis and the potential benefits resulting from a cross-fertilization of disciplines. Furthermore, few research teams have had knowledgeable tribal members on their team. The academic external funding system and the internal systems of rank and promotions relegate some tribal members to the secondary role of "informants," whose observations about their own culture are secondary to the sublime analysis of trained academic outsiders. Such informants are often deemed incapable of performing any meaningful cultural analysis even if the culture in question is their own. In research on tribal societies social scientists often take conceptual shortcuts that they would never do in comparative politics or international relations.

Wesson's book is full of inductions: subjective inferences from limited data regarding huge concepts of power and authority and tribal changes. There is not a deductively specified model in sight. Part of the problem, not uncommon in parts of the social sciences including anthropology, is the

missing link of underlying values of groups and societies and the role of these values in behavior. This deficiency belies an epistemologically materialist bias that emphasizes capital and goods. Yet the words *micco*, *communities*, *talwas*, and *clans* are abstract nouns, concepts, and realities. The meaning of these concepts lies in ideational elements and indigenous value systems. For tribes, these concepts are deeply embedded in the creation stories, which encapsulate the myths and legends regarding the formation of their societies and institutions. These deeply embedded universals do not change as easily as goods and trade items. The Creeks have deeply embedded creation, clan, and tribal formation stories that are often left out in studies of the tribe's history. Although Wesson does mention the Chekilli story from Swanton about people pouring out of the earth he does not weigh the relationship between this story and other major stories in oral history. Such stories have been passed on by elders fairly carefully. Household relationships historically were intimately entwined with clan relationships and distinctions. Creeks were not just matrilineal. They were far more complex, though the maternal side was strongly evident. The father's clan was also important in balancing relationships—in exclusions and inclusions and avoidance of incest and the tracing of kinship.

Creek life changed much with the onset of wars and disease, Indian removal, Christian missionary work, marriages outside of the tribe, Oklahoma statehood, the continuous shrinking of Creek lands, and the subversive elements in aspects of Indian education. But there are traditionals whose lives are centered on the Creek fires and the stomp grounds, and some of the traditional *miccos* and the medicine people do their best to keep the oral traditions reasonably accurate and alive and are good sources regarding the dynamics of Creek society.

Wesson's book has a nice dedication "to the Creek peoples, past, present, and future." Creeks and those interested in them might want to look at the tables assembled by the author that are derived from the Alabama excavations and draw their own conclusions. Regarding the inner evolution and dynamics of Creek society, the book is interesting but promises more than it delivers.

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From the Iron House: Imprisonment in First Nations Writing. By Deena Rymhs. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 192 pages. \$65.00 cloth.

This provocative book widens the discussion of Foucault's theoretical framework of the carceral to include the distinct ways that colonization and postcoloniality have affected Aboriginal life for generations. This excellent study of indigenous writing from prison and residential schools is a major contribution to Native American literary criticism. Rymhs's book and Tsianina Lomawaima's fine social historical study of Chillico Indian School, *They Called It Prairie Light*, could and should be read as a dialogue for researchers and students alike. Rymhs's detailed analysis of literary production from the